

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 864

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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TAGS: PINT, U.K. (N.L.)

SUBJECT: SECSTATE REES ANSWERS QUESTIONS ON CONVENTION

1. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND MERLYN REES
AT INVITATION BBC RADIO ULSTER PARTICIPATED IN 55 MINUTE
PROGRAM MORNING MARCH 21 ANSWERING QUESTIONS TELEPHONED
BY AUDIENCE. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS CONFINED TO FORTHCOMING
CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION ELECTIONS, TIMING AND PROCEDURES.

2. VIEWERS QUESTIONS REFLECTED CONCERNS ABOUT: (A) NECESSITY
TO HOLD CONVENTION AT ALL SINCE IT WAS VARIOUSLY "DOOMED TO
FAIL", "INTENDED TO FRUSTRATE WILL OF MAJORITY AND GIVE POWER
TO THOSE WHO WANT TO DESTROY GOVERNMENT", "GOVERNMENT WILL
FOLLOWING MR. WILSON'S 15 POINT PLAN LEADING TO UNITED IRELAND",
"PURPOSES CONVENTION COULD BE SERVED BY ALL-PARTY CONFERENCE",
"WHY NOT REFERENDUM ON INTEGRATION INSTEAD SINCE ULSTER PEOPLE
ARE BRITISH". (B) TIMING - "WHY HAD CONVENTION BEEN POSTPONED",
"WHEN WOULD ELECTIONS BE HELD" (C) PROCEDURES - "WOULD
CONVENTION BE TELEVISED SO THAT PEOPLE COULD SEE WHO TROUBLE-
MAKERS ARE", AND (D) RESULTS - "WHAT WILL GOVERNMENT DO
IF CONVENTION FAILS", "WHAT ARE ACCEPTABLE RESULTS", "WHY
DOES SECSTATE NOT ISSUE GUIDELINES AS TO WHAT RESULTS
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ACCEPTABLE", "WHY DOES GOVERNMENT SUPPORT MAJORITY RULE FOR

SOUTHERN AFRICA BUT NOT FOR ULSTER".

3. SECSTATE SAID IN INDIVIDUAL REPLIES HE WANTED ALLOW MONTH BETWEEN ANNOUNCEMENT AND ELECTIONS FOR CAMPAIGN, THAT CONVENTION HAD NOT RPT NOT BEEN POSTPONED BUT THAT HE NOT RPT NOT YET READY FIX DATE. HE DENIED HMG EITHER WANTED OR CAPABLE DRIVING ULSTER INTO UNITED IRELAND. PURPOSE CONVENTION HE SAID WAS GET REPRESENTATIVES PEOPLE NORTHERN IRELAND TOGETHER TO SEE IF THEY COULD DEVISE WAY OF GOVERNING PROVINCE ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH SECTIONS COMMUNITY - "A METHOD OF POWER-SHARING". HE STRESSED HISTORY INCLUDING "BLOODY BESTIALITY" OF PAST FIVE YEARS DEMONSTRATED NORTHERN IRELAND DIFFERENT FROM WALES AND SCOTLAND AND THAT DEVOLUTION MUST BE DIFFERENT. TEST OF "ACCEPTABILITY" OF CONVENTION RESULTS DEPENDED ON WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS CONVENTION WILL MAKE TO PARLIAMENT. IF CONVENTION FAILED, HE SAID, HE BELIEVED DIRECT RULE WOULD CONTINUE AND THAT HE WOULD WORK FOR THAT. HOWEVER HE SAID, THERE HAD BEEN "ATTITUDE OF HAND WASHINGTON ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND IN BRITAIN" AND HE COULD NOT RPT NOT PROMISE ANYTHING IF CONVENTION FAILED ABSOLUTELY, REES SAID SIZEABLE PROPORTION POPULATION NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD VOTE AGAINST INTEGRATION AND IN VIEW OF RECENT HISTORY HE WONDERS "WHETHER MAJORITY IN BRITAIN MIGHT NOT VOTE AGAINST IT". GOVERNMENT WHILE FAVORING MAJORITY RULE IN RHODESIA ENVISAGED A ROLE FOR MINORITY IN GOVERNMENT, HE AFFIRMED. PROCEDURES, HE SAID, INCLUDING QUESTION OF TELEVISION OR BROADCASTING PROCEEDINGS DEPEND ON DECISION ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES AND CHAIRMAN.

4. REES STATED HE WOULD NOT ISSUE GUIDELINES BUT GAVE EXAMPLES OF THEMES HE HOPED WOULD BE DISCUSSED. THESE INCLUDED MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL OF POLICE BETWEEN SECSTATE AND SOME FORM OF POLICE AUTHORITY AND ATTRIBUTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE.

5. ALL THREE LOCAL DAILY NEWSPAPERS HAVE CARRIED FULL PAGE ADS BY NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE DURING PAST WEEK ENTITLED "YOUR CONVENTION - A NEW OPPORTUNITY". ADDS OUTLINE COMPOSITION CONVENTION, ROLE OF CHAIRMAN AND WHAT A CONVENTION IS AND IS NOT. IT STRESSES SOLE TASK OF THE CONVENTION WILL BE "TO CONSIDER UNCLASSIFIED

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WHAT PROVISION FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND IS LIKELY TO COMMAND THE MOST WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY."

6. COMMENT: THE CONVENTION IDEA WAS ALMOST CERTAINLY REES BRAINCHILD. HE IS OBVIOUSLY DOING HIS BEST TO PAVE THE WAY FOR SUCCESS. IF IT FAILS IT WILL DO SO THROUGH TRADITIONAL ULSTER OB DURACY AND NOT BECAUSE OF ANY ERRORS OF COMMISSION OR

OMISSION REES HAS MADE TO DATE. IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT
FOR ANY SEGMENT OF ULSTER OPINION TO BLAME "THE BRITISH" IF
THE CONVENTION FAILS TO PRODUCE A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT.
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